



**March 31, 2006**

## **Message from the Assistant Secretary**

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### **Building Evidence-Based Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Into Community-Living Through Modernization of the Older Americans Act**

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AoA sponsored a Critical Issues in Aging Session on Friday, March 17, at the 2006 Joint Conference of the National Council on the Aging and the American Society on Aging in Anaheim, California. I was pleased to have the opportunity to address the importance of disease prevention as we modernize Older Americans Act Programs and services at this session. This modernization will strengthen the role of the National Aging Services Network in translating research into practice by promoting the use of evidence-based programs at the community-level through local aging services provider organizations such as senior centers, nutrition programs, senior housing projects, and faith-based groups. The nationwide deployment of these programs will improve quality of life, reduce health care costs, and complement the increasing focus on prevention for seniors. There is a growing body of scientific evidence being generated by the research investments of the Department of Health and Human Services and others on the efficacy of low-cost programs that can empower older individuals, including functionally impaired individuals, to better maintain their health. These programs focus on interventions such as chronic disease self-management, falls prevention, exercise, and nutrition. Other session presenters included: Carl Eisdorfer, PhD, MD, Professor and Chairman, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and Director, Center on Aging, University of Miami School of Medicine, Miami, FL; Laura N. Gitlin, PhD, Director, Center for Applied Research on Aging and Health, Jefferson College of Health Professions, Philadelphia, PA; Donna Harvey, Executive Director, Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging, Waterloo, IA and President, National Association of the Area Agencies on Aging; Kate Lorig, RN, DrPH, Professor, Stanford Patient Education Research Center, Stanford University School of Medicine, Palo Alto, CA. I look forward to continuing to work with the Network on an issue that will assume increasing importance with the aging of the Baby Boomers.

Josefina G. Carbonell

## **Top Stories**

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### **U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative**

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The U.S. Surgeon General is urging Spanish-speaking Americans to know their family health history, and HHS is offering an improved computer tool in both Spanish and English to help them do so. Calling on all Spanish-speaking Americans to "know their family history," U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., announced the availability of an updated version of a free, computerized tool in Spanish, designed to help Spanish-speaking families gather their health information. In addition, he praised the National Council of La Raza's Institute for Hispanic Health for developing its own family history consumer outreach program for Spanish-speaking Americans based on the framework made available by the Surgeon General's Family History Initiative. For additional information about the U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative, please visit <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>.

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## **More Than 27 Million Medicare Beneficiaries are Enrolled in Prescription Drug Coverage**

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### **Medicare beneficiaries signing up at a rate of 380,000 per week**

On March 23, Medicare announced that 1.9 million additional beneficiaries have signed up for prescription drug coverage since mid-February. This represents a 25 percent increase over last month in the number of people who have selected a plan and brings the total of those who have signed up individually over the past four months to approximately 7.2 million. Nearly 7 million beneficiaries are currently enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans, which include both MA-only and MA-Prescription Drug. In the past five weeks, more than 330,000 people have signed up for MA plans, and enrollment in Medicare Advantage has increased by about 1 million since enrollment in the drug benefit began. Approximately 5.7 million beneficiaries in MA receive coverage through MA-PD plans. In order to ensure that people with Medicare get their prescriptions filled quickly for the first time after they have enrolled, CMS encourages Medicare beneficiaries to sign up for drug coverage early in the month before they want coverage, or at least 2 to 3 weeks before they plan to use their coverage. For a copy of the full press release go to: <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2006pres/20060323.html>. For enrollment data by county, visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/PrescriptionDrugCovGenIn/Downloads/cedata032006.zip>. To enroll, visit [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

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## **Calcium and Vitamin D Reduce Hip Fracture Risk in Older Women**

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The results of the Women's Health Initiative Calcium and Vitamin D Trial have important implications for older women because supplementation with calcium and vitamin D in women aged 60 and older resulted in a 21 percent decreased risk of hip fracture compared with women in this age group who did not receive supplementation. More than 36,000 healthy, postmenopausal women, age 50 – 79 years of age joined the trial and were followed for an average of seven years. Half of

study participants received calcium and vitamin D supplementation and the other half received an inactive placebo. Overall, the study found that calcium plus vitamin D supplementation resulted in a small but significant improvement in hip bone density compared to the placebo group, did not significantly reduce hip fracture, and increased the risk of kidney stones for the study sample as a whole. Supplementation lowered the risk of hip fractures in some but not all groups. Women who took their assigned study pills regularly had 29 percent fewer hip fractures than those taking the placebo. The WHI will follow participants for five more years to see if findings from this and other WHI trials will change with longer follow-up. The New England Journal of Medicine published results of the Calcium and Vitamin D Trial on February 16. This study tells us that women should continue to have adequate intakes of calcium and vitamin D to maintain bone density and prevent osteoporosis based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans published by HHS and the US Department of Agriculture. For more information about the Dietary Guidelines for Americans visit: [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines). Scientists discussed findings of this and other WHI trials at the "WHI Legacy to Future Generations of Women, Update on Scientific Contributions" conference on February 28 – March 1 at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. For more information about the WHI conference presentations visit: [http://orwh.od.nih.gov/news/whi\\_conference\\_presentations.html](http://orwh.od.nih.gov/news/whi_conference_presentations.html).

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## **Health Information for Seniors: The Internet's Expanding Role**

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The Internet as a health information resource for seniors is the focus of the latest Prevention Report, a publication from HHS's Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. In approximately five years, as the first members of the Baby Boom generation reach age 65, the number of Internet-savvy seniors will start to rise sharply. However, currently, Internet use among seniors remains markedly lower than among other American age groups. Only about one-third of older adults have gone online and these seniors are not representative of the entire age group. They are predominantly white, college-educated, and have an above-average income. The Prevention Report addresses a number of challenges to using the Internet for this age group. For instance, many seniors experience a decline in vision, manual dexterity, memory, and cognitive ability that all may negatively impact their online experience. Also, seniors who do go online overwhelmingly log on from home using dial-up connections. Dial-up connections may complicate navigation of Web sites and online features, result in extremely long download times, and increase the likelihood that online forms and applications will time out. In addition to addressing the challenges associated with seniors and the Internet, the Prevention Report offers suggestions for developing senior-friendly Web sites. For example, use a sans serif 12 or 14 point font to make text easier to read, avoid automatic scrolling, and have clearly labeled links. The report concludes with examples of senior-friendly Web sites and other useful resources, such as computer training programs for seniors. For additional information, please visit: <http://odphp.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/prevrpt>.

## **Other News**

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**MetLife Foundation and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging Launch New Awards Program**

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MetLife Foundation and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging invite you to respond to a Call for Nominations for the 2006 *Older Volunteers Enrich America* Program Awards sponsored by MetLife Foundation. The program will honor volunteer programs for promising practices in recruiting and engaging older volunteers, and is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. To be eligible, volunteer programs must be in existence for at least two years and utilize volunteers 50 years and older. *Awards of Excellence in Older Volunteer Program Management* will be given to three outstanding volunteer programs whose practices in recruitment, orientation and training, retention and recognition of older volunteers set the standard and can be replicated by others. Ten additional exemplary programs will be recognized with *Awards of Achievement in Older Volunteer Program Management*. All of the award recipient programs will be featured in a guide to promising practices in engaging older volunteers that will be distributed nationwide. Nominations can be submitted online or mailed and must be received by n4a by 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Friday, April 7, 2006. The *Call for Nominations* (both online and pdf) can be found at the following link: [www.n4a.org/metlifeprogramawards.cfm](http://www.n4a.org/metlifeprogramawards.cfm). For additional information, contact Leslie Swift-Rosenzweig at 202/872-0888 or [lsrosenzweig@n4a.org](mailto:lsrosenzweig@n4a.org).

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## **Creativity in Aging Study**

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Interim results of a groundbreaking study on creativity and aging are now available. The study entitled "The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults" was launched in 2001. It was designed to evaluate the impact of professionally conducted community based cultural programs on the general health, mental health and social activities of persons age 65 and older. Elders participated in programs in the arts at three sites, Elders Share the Arts in Brooklyn, New York, the Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts, San Francisco, California, and the Levine School of Music in Washington, DC.

The programs spanned a range of art and cultural disciplines, from painting and pottery to music, dance, poetry, drama, material culture and oral histories in a creative context. Although observations and anecdotal information have indicated that programs of this type have a positive impact, no previous study of this nature using an experimental design and a control group has been carried out with older individuals. Interim results reveal positive differences in the intervention group (those involved in intensive participatory art programs) as compared to a control group not involved in intensive cultural programming. While they are statistically significant, interim results are based primarily on findings from the Washington DC site. Final results from all three sites should be ready for publication by early 2007. AoA has been a partner in the study since its inception and a member of the project Advisory Group. AoA is assisting in the dissemination of the study's findings. The study was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, NIMH, SAMHSA, AARP, the Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation and the International Foundation for Music Research. Links to a report of the study's interim findings can be accessed at: <http://www.nea.gov/resources/Accessibility/caprJan06.pdf>.

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## New Diabetes and Nutrition Information for Older Adults

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The American Society on Aging has recently added two new modules to its latest free online health promotion information as part of the *Live Well, Live Long: Steps to Better Health Program*. *Diabetes Prevention and Management: Small Steps with Big Rewards*, the seventh module in the series, was created in collaboration with the National Diabetes Education Program. This module contains information, tools, and resources to meet the challenge of preventing and managing diabetes in older adults. *Food for Health: Nutritional Well-Being for Older Adults* was developed for providers who do not have an extensive background in nutrition. The eighth module in the series, it contains information, resources, and tools to support healthy eating in older adults. For more information visit <http://www.asaging.org/cdc> or contact Chaya Gordon at [chayag@asaging.org](mailto:chayag@asaging.org).

## Making a Difference

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### Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge Initiative

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The Georgia Department of Human Resources Division of Aging Services and the University of Georgia recently launched a new web site called *Live Healthy Georgia–Seniors Taking Charge* as part of its Wellness Initiative. The site's main goal is to provide information on healthy living for people aged 50 and older, their families and caregivers. Features of the web site include current information and links for healthy living, disease risk management, community resources, an events calendar, and success stories of older Georgians who are aging well. The site also includes the Governor's Live Healthy Georgia campaign messages encouraging Georgians to eat healthy, be active, get checked, be smoke free and be positive. Other Division of Aging Services Wellness Initiative activities include: partnering with public/private agencies to promote nutrition, physical activity and healthy lifestyle; expanding chronic disease prevention focus to include diabetes disease prevention and management; planning a statewide healthy aging summit; creating a statewide public relations media campaign to promote nutrition, physical activity and healthy lifestyles. For more information visit: [www.livewellagewell.info](http://www.livewellagewell.info).

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For more information about Aging News, please visit:  
<http://www.aoa.gov/press/news/news.asp>

For more information about Health News, please visit:  
<http://www.aoa.gov/press/health/health.asp>

To view AoA's Calendar of Events, please visit:  
<http://www.aoa.gov/press/events/events.asp>

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#### **About AoA**

AoA works with a nationwide network of organizations and service providers to make support services and resources available to older persons and their caregivers. For more information about AoA, please contact us by mail at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, Washington, DC 20201; by phone at (202) 619-0724; by e-mail at [aoainfo@aoa.gov](mailto:aoainfo@aoa.gov); or visit us on the Web at [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov).